THE HYPERTEXT. Theodor H. Nelson, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., U.S.A.

We are at an historic divide like that created by movable type. To supplement movable type came such further inventions as the footnote, preface, magazine, bookshelf and editor. The technology of automatic display, stored-program computers and bulk information storage call now for a like range of inventions and conventions: display modes, organizing arrangements, and academic and professional roles and practices that will give us the most from these new devices.

This paper proposes a new medium, the hypertext. This is a generic term for texts (and combinations of texts with other materials) which, because of their structure, require automatic handling and display devices. The hypertext will typically be non-linear, branching, and large, with various options to the user.

The idea of the hypertext is distinct from Information Retrieval (specialist dissemination and query search), Information Display (presentation of data desired in a known context) and Programmed Education (restricted-sequence presentation and drill.) None of these fits the general case. The hypertext is suited not just to specialty materials (which fit on paper nicely), but to give general reference and instruction. It may contain a corpus of general and special materials, with their many interconnections indexed. Arbitrary boundaries of subject matter can be ignored. Hypertext may be built out of existing writings, not mechanically heaped but personally assembled, according to considerations of showmanship and pedagogy. Like any anthology, the hypertext may contain interrelated texts and information from diverse original sources. It may also contain summaries and abstracts written at different levels, permitting separate entry to users of different backgrounds, competences and interests, allowing them to pursue such details or overview as they desire. A hypertext system could provide instant lookup of definitions, biographies, or explanations. It could have new types of graphic material (moving or mnemonic), ways to show relations (indexes, footnotes, marginalia), even of browsing or reading (e.g., stroboscopic). Discursive, conceptual and general-purpose, it will permit self-education according to interest and motivation, even exploiting natural curiosity and intellectual gumption, which so often hinder conventional instruction.